

Once more with soul

A hat is not just an accessory, something to be donned when the cold wind blows or the bright sun shines. It is an expression of who you are as a person it speaks about you, it's part of your identity.

I make hats, or to be more accurate, I restore hats. I am not your standard milliner, the hats which I make are different. They are not fast fashion to fit the latest trend. I help people find the hat which they feel belongs to them and, to go one step further, becomes part of them.

My hats are sourced globally and brought back to my humble shop in Marylebone. My antique shelves creak with a wide array of shapes, colours and styles. These are hats which have had previous owners, who have lived their lives to the full. Loved, lost, drank, played, sang and wrung every drop out of life. All this is within the hat they were wearing and lives on without them, ready to move to their new owner. As though part of their soul remains, woven into the stitching and fabric.

My job, after restoration, is to find that perfect owner. Someone who will take the hat on a journey through their own life. Rather than sitting on stands or in boxes, they are to be worn daily and become part of the character of the owner.

Recently I had a musician come to visit me in my shop. He was a talented pianist, a young man making a start in his musical career but still looking for that illusive break. He was playing at sterile corporate awards events during dull drinks receptions and at a hotel as background music for the restaurant. For all of these gigs he had to play classic tunes which were recognisable for the regular crowd. Really he wanted to play his own style of jazz music. He came to my shop for inspiration and a hat which would bring out his musical performance.

As it happened I had recently restored a purple trilby which had belonged to an eccentric jazz musician in New Orleans. He had spent his life playing many great venues with his band and was recognisable due to his music and his distinctive hat. Once I had smoothed out some of the signs of a life well worn it was ready to go again for its new owner. I showed this hat to the young musician, explained its provenance and encouraged him to try it on. Once he donned this trilby, his posture relaxed, he walked with confidence around the shop and he looked at me with excitement in his eyes. "Yes, this is it" he tells me. I understand his latest sets at Ronnie Scott's are going down well, and he is playing his own music with his band. The soul of the hat continues, and I turn my hand to restoring the fabric and stitching of another ready for its next journey.